

ITALY 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution protects freedom of religion and the right of religious communities to establish their own institutions. It specifies the state and the Roman Catholic Church are independent, with their relations governed by treaties, including a concordat granting the church a number of specific privileges and benefits, and financial support. Twelve other religious groups have accords granting many of the same benefits in exchange for a degree of government monitoring. Unregistered religious groups operate freely and are eligible for some of the benefits that registered groups receive, but they must apply separately for them.

Between August 2021 and July, the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) expelled 61 persons, mostly due to links with what the ministry stated were violent extremist Islamist groups. Muslim groups, none of which has an accord, continued to experience difficulties acquiring permission from local governments to construct mosques and provide dedicated areas appropriate for Islamic burials. Some local governments granted permission to build mosques or temporary prayer centers and to allow or expand plots for Islamic burials, but according to the Union of Islamic Cultural Communities (UCOI), not enough to meet growing demand. There were again reports of antisemitic incidents, including physical assaults, verbal harassment, discrimination, hate speech, and vandalism. Media reported on antisemitic statements made by some politicians, including denying the right of Israel to exist, denying Israel's right to self-defense, and saying Ashkenazi Jews had "contaminated" Israel with "white supremacy" and "racism."

The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Antisemitism Observatory of the Jewish Contemporary Documentation Center Foundation (CDEC) recorded 241 antisemitic acts during the year, compared with 220 in 2021 and 224 in 2020. Of the incidents, at least 164 involved hate speech on social media or the internet, compared with 117 incidents in 2021. Press reported examples of antisemitic graffiti and posters, including depictions of swastikas on walls, antisemitic stereotypes, and praise of neo-Nazi groups in cities such as Rome, Milan, and Busto Arsizio. Experts monitoring antisemitism said they believed the number of antisemitic incidents was vastly underreported. The independent NGO Vox Diritti

reported that in its monitoring of social media, between January and October, 854 tweets mentioning Islam contained negative messages against Muslims.

Representatives of the U.S. embassy and consulates general met throughout the year with national and local government officials to encourage respect for religious freedom and equal treatment for all faiths. They also discussed efforts to integrate new migrants – many of whom were Muslim, Orthodox, or Hindu – and second-generation migrants living in the country. Embassy officials additionally expressed support for a proposed accord between the government and the country's Muslim communities. U.S. government officials met with religious leaders and civil society representatives to promote interfaith dialogue and awareness, to encourage religious groups to be more effective in interfaith outreach. On March 7, the director of the Office of International Religious Freedom and embassy officials met with National Coordinator for the Fight Against Antisemitism Milena Santerini and representatives of the Jewish community to discuss how to support their efforts to counter antisemitism and promote interfaith dialogue. The embassy and consulates continued to utilize social media platforms to acknowledge major Christian, Muslim, and Jewish holidays, as well as to amplify initiatives that promote religious freedom and interfaith dialogue on the ground.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 61.1 million (midyear 2022). According to a 2021 study by the independent Center for Studies of New Religions (CESNUR), an estimated 74.5 percent of Italians and foreigners living in the country are Catholic, 15.3 percent atheist or agnostic, 4.1 percent non-Catholic Christian, 3.7 percent Muslim, and 2.2 percent followers of other religions. Non-Catholic Christian groups include Eastern Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Assemblies of God, the Methodist and Waldensian Churches, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), the Union of Pentecostal Churches, and several other smaller Protestant groups, including other evangelical Christian groups. According to the national branch of the Church of Jesus Christ, there are approximately 26,000 adherents in the country. CESNUR also estimates that non-Christian religious groups, which together account for 5.9 percent of the population, include Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Baha'is,

Buddhists, Sikhs, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Ananda Marga Pracaraka Samgha, an Indian spiritual movement.

The Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI) estimates that the Jewish population numbers approximately 28,000, of whom approximately 22,000 are registered with UCEI, including 12,500 in Rome, 5,000 in Milan, and 800 in Florence. Per UCEI leadership, most Italian Jews would be considered Orthodox or Modern Orthodox by U.S. standards. According to the legal counsel of the Italian Federation of Progressive Judaism, which is not associated with the UCEI, the organization has between 500 and 600 members.

According to CESNUR, approximately 1.67 million foreign Muslims and 493,000 Italian Muslims (3.6 percent of the population) live in the country. Muslims with Moroccan and Albanian roots make up the largest established groups, while Tunisia, Egypt, and Bangladesh are increasingly prominent sources of Muslims arriving as irregular seaborne migrants. The MOI reports Muslims in the country are overwhelmingly Sunni.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states all citizens are equal before the law regardless of religion and are free to profess their beliefs in any form, individually or with others, and to promote and celebrate rites in public or in private, provided they are not offensive to public morality. According to the constitution, each religious community has the right to establish its own institutions according to its own statutes if these do not conflict with the law. The constitution stipulates the state may not impose special limitations or taxes on the establishment or activities of groups because of their religious nature or aims. The constitution specifies the state and the Catholic Church are independent of each other, and that treaties, including a concordat between the government and the Holy See, govern their relations.

The country's penal code contains an unenforced article on blasphemy, classifying public insults against religions or against religious followers as administrative offenses punishable by a fine ranging from €51 to €309 (\$54 to \$330). The penal

code punishes other public offenses to religion, such as offenses against objects used for religious rites or offenses expressed during religious ceremonies, with a fine of up to €5,000 (\$5,300) or a prison sentence of up to two years. Those who destroy or violate objects used for religious ceremonies may be punished with up to two years in prison.

The constitution states all religious groups are equally free, and relations between the state and non-Catholic groups regarding state support are governed by agreements ("accords") between them. Relations between the state and the Catholic Church are governed by a concordat between the government and the Holy See. Representatives of a non-Catholic faith requesting an accord must first submit their request to the Prime Minister's Office. The government and the group's representatives then negotiate a draft agreement, which the Council of Ministers must approve. The Prime Minister then signs and submits the agreement to parliament for final approval. Twelve groups have an accord: The Confederation of Methodist and Waldensian Churches, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, Jews, Baptists, Lutherans, Church of Jesus Christ, Orthodox Church of the Constantinople Patriarchate, Italian Apostolic Church, Buddhist Union, Soka Gakkai Buddhists, and Hindus.

The law provides religious groups with tax-exempt status and the right to recognition as legal entities once they have completed the registration process with the MOI. Legal registration is a prerequisite for any group seeking an accord with the government. A religious group may apply for registration by submitting an official request to a prefect (the local MOI representative) that includes the group's statutes; a report on its goals and activities; information on its administrative offices; a three-year budget; certification of its credit status by a bank; and certification of the Italian citizenship or legal residency of its head. To be approved, a group's statutes must not conflict with the law. Once approved, the group must submit to MOI administrative monitoring, including oversight of its budget and internal organization. The MOI may appoint a commissioner to administer the group if it identifies irregularities in its activities. Religious groups that are not registered may still operate legally as cultural associations and obtain tax-exempt status, legal recognition of marriages, access to hospitals and prisons, and other benefits, but those benefits are more easily obtained if a group has an accord with the government. The Catholic Church is the only legally recognized group exempted from MOI monitoring, in accordance with the concordat

between the government and the Holy See. An accord also allows a religious group to receive funds collected by the state through a voluntary 0.8 percent of personal income tax set-aside on taxpayer returns. Taxpayers may specify to which eligible religious group they would like to direct these funds.

National law does not restrict religious face coverings, but some local authorities impose restrictions. Regional laws in Liguria, Veneto, and Lombardy prohibit the wearing of burqas and niqabs in public buildings and institutions, including hospitals.

The concordat with the Holy See provides for the Catholic Church to select teachers, paid by the state, to provide instruction in weekly “hour of religion” courses taught in public schools. The courses are optional, and students who do not wish to attend may study other subjects, or in certain cases, leave school early with parental consent. Church-selected instructors are lay or clergy members or members of religious orders, and the instruction includes material determined by the state and relevant to both Catholics and non-Catholic religious groups. Government funding is available for only these Catholic Church-approved teachers. If a student requests a religion class from a non-Catholic religious group, that group must provide the teacher and cover the cost of instruction; it is not required to seek government approval for the content of the class. Some local laws provide scholarship funding for students to attend private, religiously affiliated schools, usually Catholic, that meet government educational standards.

Schools are categorized as state-owned, state-equivalent, or private. The “state-equivalent” category includes public (municipal, provincial, regional, or owned by another public entity) and some private schools, which may be religiously affiliated. All state-equivalent schools receive government funding if they meet criteria and standards published every year by the Ministry of Education. The funding is released through the ministry’s regional offices. Religious entities operate most private schools, and may issue diplomas or certificates, which the government recognizes in most cases. Private school students must take final annual exams in state-owned or state-equivalent schools.

A 2019 Lombardy regional law prohibits local authorities from dividing burial plots by religious belief, although local authorities have at times made exceptions.

According to law, hate speech, including instances motivated by religious hatred, is punishable by up to four years in prison. This law also applies to denial of genocide or crimes against humanity.

All missionaries and other foreign religious workers from countries that are not European Union members or signatories of the Schengen Agreement must apply with the MOI for special religious activity visas before arriving in the country. An applicant must attach an invitation letter from his or her religious group to the application. Eligible applicants are those who have already received priestly ordination, or equivalent status, as well as religious ministers belonging to denominational organizations already registered with the MOI, and who intend to participate in religious ceremonies or events or ecclesiastical, religious or pastoral activities. Visa duration varies based on the request of the religious organization.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

According to the MOI, between August 2021 and July, the country expelled 61 persons due to what the ministry stated were their violent extremist beliefs and/or efforts to radicalize Muslims. On May 11, authorities sentenced and deported a Moroccan national, Abdellatif Jalissi, who was formerly an imam in the city of Lodi. According to media reports, Jalissi had beaten his wife and son and prohibited his wife from leaving the house without wearing a hijab. A judge in Torino sentenced him to 27 months in prison and ordered his immediate deportation.

According to leaders of the Islamic Cultural Center of Italy, the government failed to make significant progress on reaching an accord with the Muslim community, despite dialogue underway with various Islamic religious entities. The MOI continued to recognize only the Islamic Cultural Center of Italy, which administers the Great Mosque of Rome, as a legal religious entity, making it the only Islamic entity eligible to sign an accord with the government. The government continued to recognize other Islamic groups as nonprofit organizations.

The Senate Extraordinary Committee to Fight Intolerance, Antisemitism, and Hate Crimes continued to consult experts on the nature and the root causes of hate

speech. In June, it released the preliminary results of a comparative study that highlighted that most messages on Twitter containing hate speech were sent from large cities. On June 22, the committee adopted a general resolution urging the government to adopt new norms for addressing online hate speech directed at limiting the power of social media companies. The resolution did not contain specific guidelines or standards. The committee also solicited parliament for a clear definition of “Islamophobic discrimination.”

On January 22, Milena Santerini, as National Coordinator for the Fight against Antisemitism, announced an ongoing partnership with Google Italy, with the support of the Observatory on Antisemitism, aimed at providing visibility to verified and accurate information countering antisemitic prejudices.

Regional governments and Muslim religious authorities continued to recognize eight mosques, respectively, in Colle Val d’Elsa (in Tuscany), Albenga (in Liguria), Milan, Rome, Ravenna and Forlì (in Emilia-Romagna), and Palermo and Catania (in Sicily). In addition, local governments continued to recognize many sites as Islamic places of worship, although some Muslim authorities contended these were not considered full-fledged mosques because they lacked minarets or other key architectural features such as domes.

In November, press reported that Milan would have its first official mosque, with a capacity of 3,500 devotees, that would include a cultural association, a garden, and areas dedicated to women and children. The project continued under municipal review through the end of year.

According to weekly magazine *Panorama*, there were also an estimated 800 to 1,200 unofficial, informal places of worship for Muslims in 2019 (the most recent figure), known colloquially as “garage” mosques. According to press reports, authorities allowed most to operate, but they did not officially recognize them as places of worship.

According to media reports, Muslim leaders stated they continued to experience difficulties in obtaining approvals from local governments to construct mosques. Local officials continued to cite a lack of zoning plans allowing for the establishment of places of worship on specific sites as a reason for denying construction permits, rather than anti-Muslim sentiment. Some Muslim leaders,

however, stated they believed some local authorities were using all possible legal means to block the construction of new mosques in their regions.

Media outlets reported that the construction of a mosque in Pisa began on June 8. Local authorities had authorized the construction in April 2021 to implement a 2020 ruling of the Tuscany Regional Administrative Court annulling the 2019 city council plan, which had prevented the Pisa Islamic Association from building a mosque on land it had purchased. In 2021, the Pisa Islamic Association launched a crowdfunding campaign to build the facility.

On January 21 in Florence, Imam Izzeddin Elzir announced the suspension of the construction of a permanent mosque on a piece of land offered by the Catholic Church in the city. He stated that the local Muslim community had decided to decline funds offered by two foreign governments in order to maintain its autonomy and remain independent from foreign interference.

Muslim groups continued to acquire new spaces for worship. On June 3, the Muslim community in Adria inaugurated a cultural center to be used as a place of worship. On January 31, the mayor of Turin submitted a plan from the local branch of the Italian Islamic Confederation to the city council to restructure an old foundry and establish a mosque there. On June 5, the local Islamic association inaugurated a new mosque in San Ferdinando, in the province of Reggio Calabria. On July 1, the city of Milan announced it had approved a proposal from the locally based House of Islamic Culture to establish a mosque in a municipal facility. The Muslim community committed to providing the funds and managing the center for 30 years.

Local governments continued to rent out public land at discounted rates to non-Muslim religious groups, usually Catholic, to construct places of worship. Government funding also helped preserve and maintain historic places of worship, which were almost all Catholic.

According to the UCOI, 76 local governments maintained dedicated burial spaces for Muslims, compared with 60 in 2021. Muslim associations reported there was still an insufficient number of burial plots to meet the needs of Muslim communities in Lombardy, Lazio, and other regions.

On August 26, Imen Bouhlarajane stated on social media that she was unable to find space in a Muslim cemetery in Lombardy or Piedmont to bury her father, as prescribed by Islam, and that she instead had to transport his body to Morocco for burial. She wrote, "There are many people in the same situation. Providing [burial] plots to members of all religious communities is a right."

During the year, construction began on an Islamic burial space in Brescia. The president of the Madni Dar Ul-Islam Cultural Association had requested authorization of the construction in May 2021.

On April 30, the Perugia Court of Appeals ruled that a high school teacher, Franco Coppoli, had not violated any laws or regulations by temporarily removing a crucifix from his classroom during lessons. In 2009, the Ministry of Education suspended him for one month without pay. The ruling followed a September 2021 Court of Cassation ruling that the constitution neither prohibited nor required the hanging of a crucifix in classrooms.

In August, the newspaper *Il Giornale* published a 2020 Facebook post by Raffaele La Regina, a Democratic Party (PD) candidate running for parliament, that stated, "What do you believe in more: the legitimacy of the State of Israel, aliens, or *mollicato* (a local pasta dish)? And why *mollicato*?" Then Party Secretary Enrico Letta withdrew La Regina's candidacy after his denial of Israel's right to exist, which members of the Jewish community and center and right-leaning political parties harshly criticized. Jewish Community of Rome President Ruth Dureghello said, "To nominate young people to parliament is a worthy choice, most of all if the candidates bring innovative values and ideas. If there is a need to read texts of hatred that deny the right of Israel to exist, we have a big problem." Media outlets also circulated the statements of another PD candidate, Michele Piras, who said in a 2020 interview that Ashkenazi Jews had brought a "contamination" of "negative values," such as "racism" and "white supremacy," to Israel.

On January 27, Holocaust Remembrance Day, President Sergio Mattarella hosted a ceremony to commemorate the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. He stated that the memorial "solicits us to prevent and combat, today and in the future, every germ of racism, antisemitism, discrimination, and intolerance."

On January 27, UCEI President Noemi Di Segni said in a public statement, “Events that generate hatred and violence come in new, perhaps more subtle forms, but the underlying prejudices are the same.” Referring to the country’s legal framework in the context of antisemitism, she added, “The legislation has loopholes that need to be addressed: apologies for fascism, the sale of any object that evokes symbols of Nazi-fascism, and Holocaust denial qualified as aggravating incitement to hatred,” concluding that “the freedom of thought cannot also include hate speech.” On September 18, European Jewish Culture Day, Di Segni appealed to members of parliament to work together in “addressing the issues of hatred and antisemitism.” She called on the new government, elected on September 25, to maintain the Coordinating Committee for Combating Antisemitism. She also said, “The right of the State of Israel to exist and the awareness of the responsibilities of fascism and anti-Jewish persecution cannot be separated.”

In a January 27 Facebook post, Mayor Roberto Gualtieri of Rome wrote, “Never forget, never stop spreading knowledge of the horror of horrors that destroyed the lives of innocent women, men, children.”

In a July 26 interview with the national daily *La Stampa*, Senator-for-Life and Holocaust survivor Liliana Segre expressed concern over the return of antisemitism, and said, “Holocaust denial should be challenged with counter-speech” or dissemination of an “alternative narrative, based on testimony, historical research, teaching in schools and universities.” She also stated that “cultivating memory is the duty of any civilized society,” concluding that “nurturing the sense of history is the task for each and every one of us.”

On September 18, Genoa city council member Lorenza Rosso (not associated with any political party) made an antisemitic joke while attending an event at a synagogue in Genoa in celebration of the European Day of Jewish Culture. Both Rosso and Genoa mayor Marco Bucci apologized, while the local opposition, led by members of the Democratic Party, called for her resignation. Holocaust survivor Liliana Segre commented, “If we downplay what happened, we would be guilty of the most serious crime, indifference.”

On December 19, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni spoke at a small Hanukkah ceremony organized by the Jewish Community of Rome at the Jewish Museum.

She harshly criticized “the disgrace of the racial laws” and praised Italian Jews as “a fundamental part of Italian identity.” Rome Jewish Community President Ruth Dureghello thanked Meloni for Italy's decision to vote against UN resolutions against Israel and for her words that “contribute to definitively fighting the ambiguities that in a part of the country are still present regarding fascism.”

The city of Rome continued its support for collaboration and understanding among the Jewish community, the Waldensian Evangelical Church, Eastern Orthodox communities, the Islamic Cultural Center of Italy, the Italian Hindu Union, and the Italian Buddhist Maitreya Foundation through the *Tavolo Interreligioso* (interreligious table) interfaith network. In the beginning of the year, in-person cultural events and presentations in public schools to increase awareness of religious diversity remained infrequent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The CDEC recorded 241 incidents of antisemitism during the year, compared with 220 incidents in 2021 and 224 incidents in 2020. Of the incidents, at least 164 involved hate speech on social media or the internet, compared with 117 incidents in 2021. Reports of antisemitic incidents published on CDEC’s website included discrimination, verbal harassment, particularly at soccer matches and other sporting events, online hate speech, and derogatory graffiti. Internet and social media hate speech and bullying were the most common forms of antisemitic incidents, according to the CDEC, which continued to operate an antisemitism hotline for victims of, and witnesses to, antisemitic incidents. According to National Coordinator for the Fight Against Antisemitism Santerini, the number of antisemitic incidents was vastly underreported. During a June 21 hearing in parliament, Santerini also reported that in many instances involving antisemitic graffiti and symbols and the use of the “Roman salute” (which some also label a Fascist salute, with the right arm fully extended, palm down and fingers touching), the perpetrators claimed not to be fully aware of the meaning of their actions., which they considered just “nostalgic goliardery.” She warned

that these incidents could be conducive to social prejudice and episodes of violence.

The Observatory on Antisemitism reported 22 cases of antisemitic posts on Facebook, which, it stated, represented only a small percentage of such posts. According to Milena Santerini, Facebook had removed only a small percentage of posts containing antisemitic material.

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe reported that 195 cases of grave desecration and 60 attacks on places of worship occurred in the country in 2021, compared with 158 and 47 cases, respectively, in 2020. It also reported that in 2021 there were 39 antisemitic incidents, two cases of violent attacks against Muslims, and 92 instances of attacks against Christian places of worship. The national police's Observatory on Security against Acts of Discrimination (OSCAD) reported 314 crimes of discrimination between August 2021 and July 2022, of which 92 were based on religious affiliation and 121 on ethnicity. OSCAD defined crimes of discrimination as crimes motivated by ideological, cultural, religious, or ethnic prejudices.

In June, the Brussels-based European Jewish Association (EJA) released the results of a study on 12 European countries with sizeable Jewish populations, including Italy, in terms of quality of life for Jewish residents. The survey assessed communal security, public attitudes towards Jews, and the number of Jews who said they had experienced antisemitism, combined with assessments of government actions and policies, including government funding for Jewish communities. The study also assessed whether the government had adopted a definition of antisemitism, and the status of Holocaust education and freedom of worship in each of the 12 countries. Out of the survey, Italy ranked at the top of an index of countries demonstrating respect and tolerance toward Jews, although the EJA also noted the continued comparative prevalence of antisemitic sentiment in the country.

The National Office to Fight Racial Discrimination collected 287 reports of discrimination on the grounds of religion or personal beliefs, of which 177 involved episodes of antisemitism and 46 of islamophobia.

In April, the Turin-based daily *La Stampa* reported that unidentified North African individuals assaulted two Coptic Christians of Egyptian origin in Turin for not respecting Ramadan because one of them was smoking a cigarette.

According to the Milan-based daily *Repubblica*, on May 20, two Arab men assaulted and spit on a Jewish man wearing a kippah and yelled profanities at him, requiring his hospitalization. The Jewish Community of Milan reported that on January 25, two teenage girls insulted and physically assaulted a Jewish child in Livorno, calling him a “dirty Jew” and spitting on him before kicking him.

On August 25, several Jewish organizations reported receiving an email containing death threats. On August 31, the CDEC reported several cases of insults on the internet and of graffiti against Jewish residents during the first half of the year. Most incidents occurred during Jewish holidays or celebrations.

According to media outlets, in December, a young Bangladeshi woman was the victim of a verbal and physical assault for wearing the niqab.

In its periodic review of social media posts, the NGO Vox Diritti reported that 6.6 percent of all monitored tweets (629,151) contained antisemitic messages during the year, compared with 5.2 percent of all tweets monitored in 2021. Many antisemitic tweets came from accounts based in Rome, Milan, and Venice. The NGO said spikes in tweet traffic correlated in timing with the May 20 attack against a Jewish man in Milan and other incidents.

Vox Diritti further reported that in its monitoring of social media from January to October, 854 messages on Twitter mentioning Islam contained negative content, representing 15 percent of all monitored negative messages compared with 19.57 percent in 2021. Most anti-Muslim tweets originated in northeastern regions of the country.

On March 17, Turin prosecutors announced an investigation of nine members of a neo-Nazi group located in Turin, Brescia, Brindisi, and Rieti. They were suspected of using a Telegram internet application to exchange antisemitic messages such as, “Honor the comrades who perished to rid the world of Jews.”

According to media reports, on July 22, police arrested two self-proclaimed neo-Nazis in Latina accused of producing and possessing explosive material, making serious threats against police, and propaganda and incitement to commit racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination.

On May 21, the interreligious organization Tavolo Interreligioso promoted an interfaith program in Rome dedicated to different types of religious music. In February, Tavolo Interreligioso organized a series of events to celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week, which the UN General Assembly designated as an annual event in 2010. Other events included interfaith seminars on education and social values.

On June 12, art historian David Landau announced the completion of the restoration of the first of three Renaissance synagogues in Venice started in 2020. He said restoration of the other two would be completed in 2023.

According to the most recent Pew Research Center study published in October 2019, 55 percent of Italians had negative opinions of Muslims and 15 percent had negative opinions of Jews. Negative opinions of Muslims were prevalent among the least educated (57 percent) and elderly (66 percent).

As in previous years, press outlets reported cases of antisemitic and anti-Christian vandalism, including drawings of swastikas, antisemitic stereotypes, and praise for neo-Nazi groups, on public and private property. These appeared in Rome, Milan, and Genoa. On August 29, local press outlets reported the presence of graffiti that stated, "Jews in the oven" and, in Valmadrera, "Heil Hitler." The Star of David was equated with swastikas on multiple buildings in Pisa. On May 27, authorities found a swastika insulting Roma soccer fans in Rome. On April 10, a group of Lazio soccer supporters, including minors, chanted profane antisemitic cheers during a soccer match in Genoa.

On January 25, the city of Florence announced the establishment of the Center for European Studies on Antisemitism, in collaboration with the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, to identify the root causes of hate speech and ways to counter it, including by educating youth.

On May 17, the Catholic Patriarch of Venice announced that unidentified individuals vandalized the Redentore and the Sant'Antonin Churches in the city. On April 8, authorities identified a man responsible for having painted and vandalized the portals of the cathedral, the baptistery, as well as for vandalism at a church in Parma. Representatives of all major parties condemned the actions.

In January, the Catholic Church marked the 33rd annual Day of Jewish and Christian Dialogue with a focus on verses in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah, chapter 40:1-11.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Officials from the U.S. embassy and consulates general met with representatives of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the MOI, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Coordinator for the Fight Against Antisemitism, and local government officials in Rome, Naples, Milan, Florence, and Venice. Discussions centered on the establishment of new places of worship requested by religious groups, relations between the government and Muslim religious communities, the prospect for an accord between the government and Muslim communities, and antisemitic incidents. During these meetings, embassy officials and government counterparts also discussed the integration of asylum seekers and migrants, many of whom were Muslim, Orthodox (including Romanian, Russian, and Bulgarian Orthodox), or Hindu.

Officials from the embassy and consulates general, as well as visiting Department of State officials, met with members of the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities to stress the importance of interfaith dialogue and to share U.S. best practices regarding education, the integration of second-generation migrants, and social media networking to promote respect for religious diversity.

Embassy and consulate general officials continued to meet with representatives of civil society groups, including Catholic Church-affiliated Caritas and Sant'Egidio, as well as with Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish leaders in cities throughout the country. U.S. officials urged the social inclusion of immigrants, many of whom are Muslim, as well as dialogue among various religious groups, and monitored the ability of groups to practice their religion freely. On March 7, the director of the Office of International Religious Freedom and embassy officials met with National

Coordinator for the Fight Against Antisemitism Milena Santerini and Jewish community representatives to discuss how to support their efforts to counter antisemitism and promote interfaith dialogue.

The embassy and consulates general continued to utilize social media platforms to acknowledge major Christian, Muslim, and Jewish holiday messages and promote respect for all faiths, as well as to amplify initiatives that support religious freedom and encourage interfaith dialogue at the local level. This included postings of Department of State statements regarding the International Religious Freedom Act and related topics.